

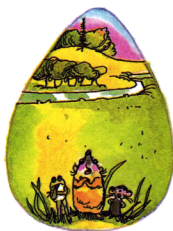
ENO RAUD



THE HAUGHTY EGG

TALLINN • PERIOODIKA

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1. THE HEN AND THE EGG

One day the hen went to her nest in the cowshed and made up her mind to lay an egg. She sat on her nest very quietly and, hardly moving at all, focused all her attention on doing the job.

It certainly took some time but at last the egg was laid. It was quite an ordinary egg—smooth and white, with the top a little narrower than the bottom and the bottom a little broader than the top. Nevertheless, the hen was very happy with her egg and she started to cackle out of the great joy that filled her.

"Why are you cackling so loud?" the egg asked the hen. "Haven't you got anything better to do?"

The hen stopped cackling and stared at the egg in utter surprise.

"I was cackling out of happiness," she explained. "I'm so happy to have laid you."

The egg mumbled scornfully,

"Are you trying to tell me that you have laid me?" he said.

"I don't remember any such thing happening."

"It may be that you don't," smiled the hen. "But I do remember it very well. It was only a short while ago that you popped into my nest."

"Maybe you even imagine to have laid the sun in the sky," snapped the egg. "It is almost as bright and round as I am, only a little yellower."

The happy smile disappeared from the hen's beak and she sighed.

"You are a snooty egg indeed!"

"Snooty," mocked the egg haughtily. "How can I be snooty when I have no snoot at all. I am smooth all over."

Now the hen became seriously worried about her egg.

"You are too full of self-importance," she said, shaking her head and heaving a deeper sigh than before.

However, the hen's sadness didn't concern the egg in the slightest.

"Of course I am full of self-importance," he cried in a shrill voice. "Whose importance must I be full of but my own? I am an egg from top to bottom."

"Don't you try to be such a know-all," said the hen disapprovingly. "I've never had an egg like you before."

Thereupon the egg only scoffed and rolled himself out of the nest with a mighty swing.

"Where are you going? Come back to the nest at once!" cackled the hen.

"Don't order me about," cried the egg. "You go on sitting





on your mouldy nest if it pleases you. I'm too beautiful and smooth and clever to fit in here."

And on he rolled again.

"Where are you going?" cackled the hen **anxiously** and scurried after the egg. "What place do you think will be fitting for you then?"

"The highest place I can find. I want a place where I can stand out," declared the egg, rolling on faster and faster.

Still arguing they reached the farmyard—the egg rolling in front, the hen cackling behind. The farmyard animals were quite surprised to see an egg rolling along.

Baa-baa! Do you see what I see!" bleated the sheep.

Mew-mew! Look at this! Whirrs like a whirling!" mewed the cat.

And the cock crowed, "Cock-a-doodle-do! Stop! Stop!"

The dog made a couple of jumps toward the egg as if he wanted to play with him but the egg had already slipped under the gate and rolled on toward the woods.

The hen ran on cackling for some time, but after a while collected herself and went back to her nest with the intention of laying a new, more sensible egg.

Our egg, however, rolled farther and farther across the **green** meadow, feeling very much pleased with himself and his rolling.

2. THE FROG'S TUSsock

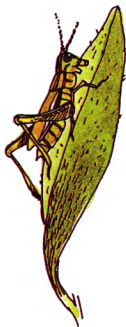
The egg rolled on. Around him he saw the fluttering butterflies and the colourful flowers and his yolk-yellow heart was full of joy. He was in no hurry now. He had run away from the **hen** and could now take his time to look for a nice high place to **settle on**. The grass blades tickled him encouragingly and he enjoyed the delicate **smell** of flowers and the warm touch of the sunrays. 'How beautiful **and** smooth and clever I really must be,' he thought delightfully.

All of a sudden he stopped abruptly—right before him, in the middle of his path, stood a high green tussock. And it croaked. 'What an 'ugly sound,' the egg thought. 'And absolutely unsuitable for a tussock to make!'

"**What are you croaking for?**" the egg shouted aggressively. "**Stop it at once, do you hear!**"

In answer to this there came a croaking laughter from the top of the tussock.





"You don't think a tussock can croak, do you?" someone called to him merrily. "It is me who's doing it."

Only now did the egg notice a green frog on top of the tussock. Feeling a little embarrassed because of his ignorance he muttered angrily,

"Don't put on airs!"

"A frog on top of a tussock is bound to be important," said the frog, nodding his head. "It wouldn't be proper if he wasn't."

The egg couldn't think of what to say next. Instead, he rolled a couple of times round the tussock and took a good look at it. Finally he decided that the tussock was high enough and just the place for him to settle on.

"Get off the tussock at once!" he ordered the frog. "I want to be important on it myself."

To hear such talk from an egg utterly confused the frog. He even forgot to be angry.

"I am green and the tussock is green. Therefore you didn't notice me," he spoke calmly. "But as you are white you'll stand out a mile."

"Why shouldn't I stand out!" screamed the egg. "I'm a very outstanding egg."

The frog shook his head in disbelief.

"If you are so clearly seen you'll be an easy prey for a foe," he explained.

The egg, however, thought that the frog was speaking out of plain jealousy.

"Nobody can ever snatch me, I'm so smooth and slippery!" he shouted. "Take my advice and come down willingly or I'll chase you off the tussock!"

This was too much for the frog. He couldn't bear this impudence any longer and turned green in the face with anger.

"Come and try, chick! Come and try!" he puffed threateningly, ready for an attack.

The word—chick—sounded unusually sweet to the egg and somehow made his heart so mellow that he felt an urge to peep. Nevertheless, he suppressed his brief feeling of tenderness. Full of determination he began to climb the tussock.

The frog went on puffing angrily.

"You just come and try," he repeated, "and I'll show you what a scrambled egg looks like!"

A scrambled egg?... Another strange word the egg didn't know. Yet it didn't arouse any tenderness in him this time. Instead, he had an uncomfortable feeling.

"What's a scrambled egg?" he asked suspiciously and

stopped for a moment. But as he was indeed very smooth and slippery, he started rolling backwards, down the sloping tussock.

"A scrambled egg is the only good thing you'll ever make," croaked the frog.

The egg had no idea whether the frog was making fun of him or telling the truth. A scrambled egg? What on earth could this sinister word mean? But never mind that now—he was not an egg to give up an enterprise he's set his mind on just because of a curious word.

"You are a puffed-up frog!" he shouted hotly and took a swing up the tussock again.

Thereupon the frog puffed out his chest and bellowed, "You are a blown-up egg yourself!"

3. THE TROUBLESOME MOUSE

The egg was rolling up the tussock in full swing when he heard a squeaky voice from the other side of the slope.

"I'd like to see a blown-up egg too," the squeaky voice spoke hurriedly. "A blown-up egg must be a sight quite worth seeing."

Taken by surprise, the egg stopped.

"Of course I am!" he cried, but having lost the swing he started to roll downwards.

At the same moment a mouse emerged from the other side of the tussock.

"An outstanding sight or not—this blown-up egg is a great nuisance," the frog complained to the mouse. "He wants to evict me from my tussock."

The mouse gave the egg a sharp look.

"I see," she said, after a pause. "But never mind, a blown-up egg can always be sucked empty."

"How?" asked the egg with interest. "How do you do it?"

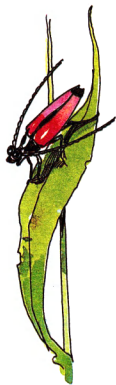
"It's very simple," explained the mouse. "We'll make a small hole into your both ends and then it's all the same from which end we begin to suck you empty."

"Does it hurt?" inquired the egg.

"I suppose at first you feel a little uncomfortable," answered the mouse in a matter-of-fact way. "But afterwards you'll feel a lot lighter."

"Are you sure?" asked the egg hesitatingly.

"Of course, a lot lighter," assured the mouse. "Because



the frog and I shall both have half an egg and you'll have the empty shell."

"You'll feel lighter and we'll get a scrambled egg into the bargain," the frog added. "So, it's profitable to both you and us."

The frog should never have mentioned this sinister word. The mention of it made the egg suspicious at once and he refused to listen to any more of this sucking-business.

"I won't agree to that," he declared firmly. "As long as I am' an egg I won't let anyone scramble me."

"He sure is a haughty one!" squeaked the mouse.

She had no wish to drop her plan without at least making an effort and so she began to trip stealthily toward the egg. The egg was no coward, but with the word 'scrambled egg' still drumming threateningly in his ears, he thought it wiser to move away from the mouse as quickly as he could. In another instant both of them were racing round the tussock, the egg in front and the mouse close at his heels.

Sitting on top of his tussock, the frog watched the race with enormous delight. It was like a crazy merry-go-round whirling before his eyes at a speed which almost made him dizzy.

"Get hold of his ears!" the frog called the mouse.

"I would, if I could find them!"

"Try to wring his neck!" the frog went on.

"I can't make it out: his body and neck have grown into one."

The frog grew impatient.

"Try to turn him over on his back!"

The mouse panted in answer,

"Where's his back? Where's his belly? I can't figure it out!"

No doubt the mouse must have been very confused. Then the frog gave his last piece of advice,

"Throw him off his feet!"

But how can you throw someone off his feet when he has no feet at all?

Nevertheless, the egg wasn't as safe as it looked. Although the mouse had failed to throw him off his feet, he felt giddy from racing round the tussock. The more rounds they made the giddier he felt. There was no doubt that before long the mouse would catch him. On top of all this, he couldn't think properly any more, the sinister word kept drumming in his ears,

'Scrambled egg... scrambled egg... scrambled egg....'







4. THE HEDGEHOG COMES TO THE EGG'S AID

The egg was on the point of collapsing from exhaustion and giddiness. Panting threateningly, the mouse followed close at his heels, never losing ground, and the egg knew that he would be caught any minute now.

The mouse had already opened her mouth and was about to bite a hole into the egg when they heard a shrill whistle close by.

This unexpected and shrill whistle frightened the egg as well as the mouse to a standstill. They looked around in alarm, and almost at the same time caught sight of the hedgehog who was approaching with angry snorts.

On reaching the tussock the hedgehog gave another whistle. Then she asked sternly,

"What's going on in here?"

"Nothing much," the frog called out to her from his tussock.

"The mouse and the egg were only playing 'egg-rolling.'"

The hedgehog, however, did not seem to be satisfied with the frog's explanation.

"You better watch out or I'll start a game of hedgehog and frog with you," she shouted at the frog, who fell silent immediately.

Now the hedgehog turned to the mouse.

"Why were you chasing the egg?" she asked.

"Well..." squeaked the mouse, trying to look very innocent, "we were just running around..."

But at the same time the egg rolled himself nearer to the hedgehog and declared,

"The mouse is an egg sucker. She wanted to suck me empty!"

This news angered the hedgehog so much that her spines prickled up in every direction.

"So that's how things are!" she cried. "But I tell you I won't let anybody suck the egg. I like him because he reminds me of my own little ones."

"What are you saying! He hasn't even any prickles on his back," the frog dared to speak again. "He is smooth and slippery all over."

And the mouse, too, supported the frog,

"He really is. He's so smooth and slippery that you can't even get hold of him."

"Besides that," added the frog, "all little hedgehogs are lovely and grey while the egg is white and can be easily seen everywhere."

The hedgehog took a good long look at the egg. She had to admit to herself that there was some truth in what the frog and the mouse had been saying. After a pause she said thoughtfully,

"Well, he does stand out, I must say, and that's bad...."

She was interrupted by the egg, whose shrill voice broke in,

"No, it's not bad at all, because I want to stand out well. I am as bright as the sun. As it is, at night I'm even brighter than the sun."

Such an arrogant talk on the egg's part made both the frog and the mouse speechless, so they only shook their heads in great annoyance. It was unheard of! He dared to compare himself with the sun! The hedgehog, however, seemed to be amused.

"What a little boaster he is," she laughed. "Exactly like my own little ones. They're not much better either!"

"The egg is a snooty little boaster," piped the mouse.

The hedgehog took no notice of the mouse's remark. She went up to the egg and stroked him tenderly with the moist tip of her nose.

Now the egg decided to take full advantage of the hedgehog's kind heart.

"May I go to the top of the tussock?" he pleaded. "If you really like me, please allow me to go to the top of the tussock at least for once."

The hedgehog didn't quite understand why the egg was so persistent on getting to the top. Nevertheless, she said,

"Go ahead, little egg. Who's here to stop you."

"But the frog won't let me," complained the egg, pointing his top at the frog accusingly.

The frog shifted himself anxiously,

"But this is my tussock."

The hedgehog, however, snorted resolutely,

"The tussocks in the meadow belong to everybody."

And when the hedgehog also advanced threateningly towards the frog he could do nothing but jump off the tussock in a great haste.

With the frog out of the way, it was easy going. The egg took off with a mighty roll up the slope and didn't stop until he had reached the top. There he spun round vainly and raised himself on his bottom. He stood motionless and boastfully called out to the others,

"Look at me! Look at me! Am I not a true monument to my own self!"



5. THE MESSENGER OF ILL LUCK

Standing on the tussock the egg looked around with interest. Not far away a babbling river was winding its way through the meadow, beyond the river there was a dark green wood, and in the middle of the wood stood a hill with a tall fir tree growing on its very top. And without being aware of it, his thoughts began to gather more and more round one thing—the top of the hill. That really was a very high place. Wouldn't it be something to look down from up there....

Suddenly the egg noticed a big bird fly out of the crown of the fir tree and head for the tussock at a good speed. "Oh dear, dear!" cried the hedgehog. "The magpie's coming. She always forebodes disaster."

But the egg remained quite calm.

"Nothing to worry about!" he said. "I'm sure she can show me the way to the hilltop."

This talk deeply agitated the hedgehog. In great alarm she ran to and fro and lamented,

"Don't you see! The magpie's nest is on that hill too. If you go there it will be your swan song."

The egg gave her a sneering look.

"There's no need for me to sing any song, the magpie will do it for me," he answered snappily. "The important thing is that on the hilltop I can stand out well."

At that moment the magpie arrived and perched on a bush nearby. She had heard the egg's last words.

"Chat-chat-chat, the little egg is right," she cawed merrily. "Let's frolic on the hill, you'll stand out well. If you only say, I'll show you the way."

The egg's folly and vanity drove the hedgehog to sheer despair. It was only with a great effort that she could pull herself together and stop running about.

"Will you shut up, you thieving Magpie!" she shouted, glaring at the bird furiously. "Who asked you to come here, anyway?"

The magpie didn't seem to have taken offence, for she cawed out as merrily as before,

"There I looked from the hilltop. Saw the green tussock. Took another look—and there was an egg on it. A white, sparkling egg. That's why I came. So to say, to investigate and to admire this beautiful egg."

"I bet your beak is itching to investigate the inside of him," said the mouse grimly.

The frog added in a complaining voice,







"Didn't I tell you the egg would be an easy prey standing up there on my tussock."

Now that the egg was in real danger both the mouse and the frog couldn't help feeling sorry for him. There was no denying that the egg was arrogant and snooty. Still, it wasn't by any means pleasant to imagine how, after luring the egg into her nest, the magpie would have him for breakfast.

Filled with dismay the hedgehog burst into tears.

"Oh my poor little egg! Why ever did I allow you to climb to the tussock," she moaned. "Disaster has hit us! The magpie will soon have you in her clutches."

Who knows, maybe the egg would have started to take the warnings of the three seriously if the magpie had not interfered again,

"Stop this chit-chal! My claws won't clutch, my beak doesn't itch, my eyes only watch."

The magpie's cawing was so jolly and friendly that the egg simply couldn't suspect her of any ill will.

"Let's go!" the magpie called out to the egg. "Let's start rolling and flying. Let's roll over the meadow and fly high to the top of the hill!"

"Off we go," shouted the egg excitedly and, in next to no time, he was already rolling down the slope.

The magpie took off as well, and so they headed toward the hill, the magpie flying in front, the egg rolling on the grass after her.

"Stop!" shouted the mouse.

"Do stop!" cried the frog.

All the hedgehog could do was to shed bitter tears.

But it was too late—the egg rolled on and on and on.

6. A FRIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE

When the hedgehog, the frog and the mouse had recovered from the first shock they scurried after the egg. Although they never hoped any longer that the egg would come to his senses, they didn't have the heart to leave him at the mercy of the magpie.

In the meantime the egg had reached the river. There lay a narrow tree log across it. Without hesitation the egg jumped onto the log. Staring fixedly at the hill he rolled along, without a care in the world.

"Don't look at the hill! Look in front of your feet!" cried the frog.

The egg answered with a peal of laughter,

"What feet!" he cried cheekily. "Don't you see I have no feet!"

"Then watch your step at least!" warned the mouse.

The egg only laughed,

"I don't step, I roll."

"The way you keep flying, you'll fall in!" cried the hedgehog.

"How can I fly when I have no wings," littered the egg.

Hardly had he said that when the most terrible thing happened. He lost his balance and fell with a splash into the river. In another moment he had vanished altogether.

The hedgehog burst out crying again,

"Oh dear! Oh dear! The egg was so much like my own little ones. Thinking back now I almost saw prickles on his back!"

The frog and the mouse felt miserable too. Sadly they gazed into the river where only the ripples marked the place where the egg had vanished.

"Poor little egg!" moaned the frog.

And the mouse said regretfully,

"It's me who is to blame for all this. Why didn't I suck him empty! Now he would have been sailing like a boat on the river."

By that time the magpie had also noticed that the egg had disappeared. He flew back circling over the river.

"Where's the egg? What's become of him?" she screeched, looking confused.

"Our poor egg is resting on the cold river-bed," answered the hedgehog in a broken voice.

Now it was the magpie's turn to feel sorry for the egg whom such a great misfortune had befallen.

"So he didn't take care, and now lies in there," she screeched.

"You've certainly lost your chance to grab him," the mouse retorted. To think of it, pondered the mouse—the only good thing in this great misfortune was that the magpie didn't get the egg either. Still, it was a poor consolation. Certainly it couldn't have made any difference for the poor egg whether he had to end up in the magpie's nest or in the bottom of the river....

The magpie made another circle over the river and then flew off, saying,

"What a pity! But there's nothing we can do about it. See you around!"





The others didn't say anything.

Soon the magpie disappeared into the distance.

"Good riddance!" croaked the frog.

The hedgehog heaved a sigh.

"The egg was a sweet little thing, so good and polite. I'm quite sure now that he did have prickles on his back," she said in a broken voice.

"You're only imagining it," said the mouse.

"I see him in my imagination too. He's sinking slowly to the muddy river-bed," the frog put in.

This remark was the last straw. The poor hedgehog couldn't take any more of it.

"Stop imagining!" she shouted at the frog. Startled, the frog fell silent.

The hedgehog walked to the edge of the bank and gazed fixedly into the water. Both the mouse and the frog realized that she was pondering over something.

7. THE HEDGEHOG MAKES THE FROG TAKE A DIVE

The hedgehog kept pondering for a long time until she had everything planned out in her mind. She turned to the frog in a ceremonious manner,

"Your big moment has come, my dear friend! Here's your chance to prove us what you are worth."

Although the frog was unable to make head or tail of the hedgehog's talk he drew his lungs full of air and thrust his chest out in an important manner.

"My good frog, you must dive into the river," the hedgehog continued, "and find out what has happened to the egg."

The frog let the air slowly out of his lungs.

"But the pike lives down there," he said in a shaky voice. The hedgehog frowned at him.

"Well, what of it?" she asked, full of challenge.

"A pike in the river is worse than a wolf in the wood," mumbled the frog.

"Is he really so dreadful?" squeaked the mouse. "Isn't there anyone who could get the better of him?"

"The pike's teeth are terribly sharp," said the frog, squinting at the hedgehog. "Thirty-three members of my family have disappeared behind them."

The mouse began to do some mental arithmetic.





"Thirty-three," she repeated, after a pause. "I gather it must be more than three, mustn't it!"

"No doubt about that," the frog muttered grimly.

The hedgehog was growing impatient.

"Enough of that counting! The frog must jump into the river first, you can do your arithmetic later on if you wish."

"I know already what the answer will be when I jump into the river," croaked the frog. "Thirty-three plus one is thirty-four. Thirty-four frogs whose lives have ended between the pike's terrible jaws."

"Enough of this prattle!" the hedgehog bawled. "Get on with the dive before it's too late."

"Why should I take my skin to the market," the frog protested.

"Not to the market, but into the river," corrected the hedgehog, and went on. "You are the only amphibian among us. That's why you are in your element both on land and in water."

There was no denying that the hedgehog had a point there. The frog knew it very well himself that he belonged to the amphibian family. Therefore underwater swimming was no problem to him. But to deal with the pike was a different matter. Even the strongest frog couldn't manage it. The pike was a voracious attacker, the kind one would not find on dry land. There were certain dangers on dry land also. Take the stork for instance. She could make a lot of trouble with her long beak. Even the hedgehog didn't show mercy to every frog. Still, in their case, the danger could be seen and heard from afar. You had at least a chance to hide and escape. But the pike attacks like a bolt from the blue—a swift stroke, and there's eternal darkness for you....

"Come on, start moving," the hedgehog hurried the frog. "What is there to think about?"

"I'm thinking about the pike," croaked the frog.

The mouse made an attempt to encourage the frog.

"Try to keep cool," she said. "Then fear won't get the upper hand of you."

However, this good piece of advice didn't make the frog feel any perkier.

"But I am cool all the time," he said. "I'm a thorough cold-blooded amphibian. The problem is that I can't help being afraid even when keeping cool."

The sight of her friend trembling with fear aroused deep pity in the mouse's heart.

"Listen hedgehog," she squeaked, "as the frog is so scared

of the pike, perhaps we shouldn't take all that trouble for the egg's sake. After all, he himself has brought the misfortune about for being so haughty."

"The mouse is right," the frog said. "It makes sense."

But the hedgehog would not relent. It didn't bother her that the frog feared for his life, her thoughts were with the egg only.

"So you're afraid of the pike?" she shouted. "How come you're not afraid of me?"

All rolled up, she moved threateningly towards the frog. The frog realized that the hedgehog meant business. He had to choose between the pike's teeth and the hedgehog's prickles. As it was, the pike's teeth were not visible as yet, but the hedgehog's prickles were flashing right before his nose....

The frog shut his eyes tight and jumped into the river with a mighty splash.

8. ADVENTURES IN THE RIVER-BED

Having dived to the river bottom, the frog swiftly hid in the bulrushes and kept still, only her eyes kept looking around.

Everything seemed to be quiet and peaceful. The river plants were gently swaying in the flowing water and a small shoal of stickleback were swimming to and fro near the surface. However, the frog knew that this calm was deceptive. He knew that the pike was keeping watch somewhere, lying in wait among the leaves of the pondweed, as motionless as a dead stick.

All of a sudden the frog started. A very familiar voice sounded nearby.

"Why hasn't anyone come to welcome me? What kind of reception is this?" screamed the egg.

And in the next moment he saw the egg himself, prancing importantly along the river bottom, indignant at the river people for not giving him a grand welcome.

The loud screaming must have awakened the water rat. He came out of his hole to see what the commotion was about.

"Who do you think you are that river people must come out to greet you?" he asked the egg.

The egg stopped bouncing and looked sharply at the water rat.

"I am an important egg," he declared. "And as I am important, everybody must greet me."





"I see," said the water rat. "Hi!"

And upon this, he sneezed several times.

The egg wasn't pleased with this kind of greeting at all. In his opinion the water rat ought to have greeted him much more ceremoniously, and, at any rate, he should not have sneezed.

"Is this the way to receive me! Your whiskers tousled, your feet muddy! You certainly haven't the faintest idea about mannerly behaviour," he screamed.

The water rat was so surprised at that kind of haughty talk that all he could do at first was to shake his head. Before he could think of an answer another river dweller, the crayfish, appeared. She had crept out from under her stone and was now walking toward them with her back first, as usual.

"Good afternoon," she said politely.

But the egg wasn't satisfied with her manners either.

"You are a boor! Why do you greet me with your back?" he screamed. "I am a very important egg and you must face me when you greet me."

The crayfish smiled appeasingly, and explained,

"As a matter of fact, I am facing you. You see, there is little difference between my front and my back, because I'm in the habit of walking with my back first."

"It's a silly habit," retorted the egg snappily.

"No, not really," said the crayfish, ignoring the egg's impudence. "Thanks to my habit I can always see what's happening behind my back."

"If you can see behind your back you can't see in front of you, can you?" the egg pointed out.

"Well," said the crayfish with a smile. "I would say that most of the foes are in the habit of attacking you from the back."

"But what will happen if one day you're attacked from the front?" inquired the egg.

"Then I'll turn around, and there will be no enemy in front of me any more!" said the crayfish.

In order to help the egg to understand it better the crayfish turned round, but the view in front filled her with terror and she stared fixedly behind the egg's back.

The egg also took a glance behind to find out what the crayfish was staring at. And he too sighted... the pike.

The pike stood motionless and stared at the egg with his cold eyes.

"Wonderful," exclaimed the egg. "At last there's somebody



who understands my importance. At last there's somebody who stands at attention before me."

When the egg had finished there was a complete silence. And then....

Like lightning, like a bolt from the blue, as the frog had said, the pike darted at the egg. His enormous jaws opened and the egg disappeared down his dreadful throat.

'So that was the way the pike greeted the egg, the way he respected him,' thought the frog. But he had no more time to ponder over it because he was busy fleeing towards the bank with all his might.

9. THE CRAYFISH COMES ASHORE

The frog climbed out of the water, gasping for breath and looking green in the face. He leapt to where the hedgehog and the mouse were waiting impatiently and croaked between coughs,

"I escaped... by the skin of my teeth."

But the hedgehog wasn't concerned about the frog's narrow escape.

"There you go again!" she shouted at the frog. "You're always talking about yourself. We can see ourselves you're safe. Now tell us what has happened to the egg."

"He's finished," said the frog in a croaky voice. "The pike swallowed him down at one gulp. That was certainly the end of him."

"My poor little egg! My poor little egg!" the hedgehog wailed. "Now I remember for sure that he had prickles on his back."

The mouse's thin voice broke in,

"If he had prickles on his back even the pike could not have swallowed him."

The hedgehog made no answer. She looked gloomy and deep in thought.

"They say the pike is awfully greedy," continued the mouse. "Uncle water rat told me once that the pike gulps everything down whole, whatever comes his way."

This news made the hedgehog perky in an instant.

"What did you say?" she asked. "Gulps them down whole?"

"That's what uncle water rat says," answered the mouse.

"Gulps them down whole?" repeated the hedgehog. "Quite whole?"



"That's how he does it," said the mouse. "One gulp and down into his tummy they go."

"Then we haven't lost all hope," cried the hedgehog. "Our little egg may still be whole. Let's put our heads together and think of how to get him out of the pike's belly."

The frog had an uncanny feeling inside him.

"We'll never think it out," he said quickly.

"Who else will then?" asked the hedgehog.

"Maybe the crayfish," suggested the mouse. "Uncle water rat says that there's nobody in the river as clever as the crayfish."

The hedgehog gave a nod of approval.

"The crayfish it will be," she said. "Why shouldn't we turn to the crayfish for a piece of advice! The frog can go and ask her to come ashore."

The frog shuddered.

"How can I possibly know under which stone the crayfish lives?" he said quickly. He preferred not to mention then that he had run across the crayfish only a short while ago.

The hedgehog discarded the frog's remark.

"Don't worry, you'll find her. With her scarlet shell she'd be easy to spot."

In spite of the gloomy circumstances the frog couldn't suppress a chuckle.

"A crayfish turns scarlet only after it has been boiled," he explained to the hedgehog. "As for those who are still swimming in the river, they are black. Black and dreadful."

"And clever," added the mouse. "Though, after being boiled they're not so clever any more," he said as an afterthought.

Who knows, what turn the discussion would have taken if a crackling sound hadn't demanded their immediate attention. It was coming from the river bank.

"Did I hear right?" a curious voice called out to them. "Who is planning to boil me?"

The next moment they caught sight of the crayfish herself who was climbing up the bank, moving back first, as usual.

"Oh-ho!" cried the frog happily. "Talk of the crayfish and here she comes!"

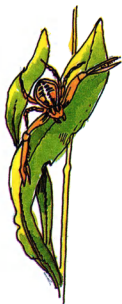
The mouse began to explain hastily,

"Dear crayfish, nobody wants to boil you. Instead, we'd like to ask your advice, for we've heard of your great wisdom."

"Thank you," nodded the crayfish with obvious pleasure.

"Ask away, and I'll try to answer. Wisdom is a magic treasure, it never grows less with use."

This was very wisely put, and the hedgehog was convinced



that the crayfish was clever indeed. He walked up to her, bowed respectfully and said,

"Welcome, Mrs. Crayfish."

The crayfish smiled.

"Just a moment, my dear! Let me turn round first," she said and began to turn herself round. It took some time to accomplish it, but finally there she stood happily facing the hedgehog, the frog and the mouse. Raising her right claw in greeting she said,

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance."



10. CONFERENCE ON THE SHORE

The hedgehog told the crayfish how anxious she was for the egg's safety and the crayfish listened to her sympathetically. When the hedgehog had finished the crayfish said wisely,

"I happened to see the pike swallow the egg down whole."

"Did you really?" exclaimed the hedgehog.

"Gulped him down whole?" squeaked the mouse.

"Quite so," the crayfish continued. "The pike's jaws were wide open. And moreover, he went to sleep afterwards. He always goes to sleep after gulping something down whole."

"What a heartless creature!" the hedgehog puffed indignantly. "He swallows our little egg and can sleep quite peacefully afterwards."

"Won't it be the right moment to rescue the egg now, while the pike is asleep," squeaked the mouse.

"You will make a fine rescuer indeed," grumbled the frog. "No tooth is sharp enough to crack him, no matter whether he's awake or sound asleep."

The frog expected the crayfish to side with him but that didn't happen. Having thought for a while, the crayfish stretched out her claws, and said,

"We are not armed with sharp teeth therefore we must make use of sharp scissors. And as you can see I happen to have two pairs of them on me!" She opened her claws like one handles scissors and then continued,

"It's child's play to cut the pike's belly open with these scissors of mine."

The hedgehog and the mouse were speechless with delight. They really began to believe that the crayfish was capable of rescuing the egg.



"Wonderful," exclaimed the hedgehog, breaking the silence. "Dear crayfish, we don't know how to thank you."

The crayfish smiled modestly.

"It's too soon to thank me yet," she said, closing her claws. "You'd better get me a needle and some thread."

"A needle and thread? What do you need them for?" asked the mouse.

"To sew up the pike's belly afterwards," said the crayfish. "We can't let the pike swim about with his belly open, can we?"

After thinking it over, the other two had to admit that swimming with one's belly open wouldn't be right.

"Maybe a quitch-grass root would do for thread?" suggested the mouse. "It's very strong and doesn't break."

The crayfish nodded.

"Smart thinking," she said, looking at the mouse with approval. "Suppose you go and find us, let's say, half a reel of that grass root."

"I'll find it for sure. I know all about roots," cried the mouse.

Immediately she started to search in the grass for a really tough and strong quitch plant.

The frog cleared his throat.

"Well, how about the needle? Where can we get a needle?"

He still cherished a small hope that the needle might become an obstacle to carrying out that dangerous rescue operation. The hedgehog, however, crushed this hope with her position,

"I have almost a thousand needles on my back. Pull out a couple you like best. Only take care that you don't prick yourself."

"Are you crazy? It's going to hurt!" cried the frog. "It's very painful to have a needle pulled out."

The hedgehog, however, remained calm.

"It will hurt me, not you," she retorted. "In any case, I don't mind suffering a little pain for the egg's sake."

This settled the matter. The crayfish walked up to the hedgehog, there was a snap—and she was holding a prickle between her claws. It happened so fast that the hedgehog had no time to feel any pain.

"Our crayfish is like a dentist," muttered the frog without much enthusiasm.

But the other two took no notice of his grumbling.

In the meantime the mouse had pulled out a long white quitch-grass root and laid it on the grass before the crayfish.



"Excellent, it's first-rate," said the crayfish, having looked the root over.

It seemed to the other three that all preparations for the egg's rescue operation were ready, but the crayfish didn't start for the river. Instead, she began looking around her as if something was amiss.

"Is there anything else you need?" asked the hedgehog.

"The point is..." murmured the crayfish more to herself than to the others, "that if you take anything away from somewhere you must replace it with something else. This is the law of Mother Nature. She doesn't like empty places."

"Are you saying that even the pike's belly can't be empty just for a while?" wondered the mouse.

"No, it can't," said the crayfish. "It would be against the law of nature. There must always be something in the pike's belly whatever it is."

Suddenly she noticed a puff-ball within a few paces from them.

"A puff-ball! That's excellent!" she said, beaming. "I suppose a little plant food can't do the pike any harm."

And in the next instant she had already dug the puff-ball out of the ground.



11. THE RESCUE OPERATION

The egg couldn't make head or tail of what was happening to him after the pike had gulped him down.

"How strange," he pondered. "Just a short while ago I had plenty of room to roll about, now I don't even seem to have elbow room."

All his attempts to move himself failed. It felt as if he were squeezed between some soft and moist walls.

"It was wet before," he thought. "Now it's only moist. It was dim before, now it's pitch dark. I wish I knew what sort of a den I am in now."

For a moment he thought that he had fallen asleep and was having a dream, but soon realized that it couldn't be a dream, after all.

"How can it be a dream if I don't see anything. After all, in a dream you always see something. But here there's nothing but plain darkness."

Suddenly the egg felt he was moving. He was moving although he couldn't move himself. What was that supposed

to mean? The egg pondered on it hard, yet he couldn't find any reasonable explanation.

Then the movement stopped. He wasn't moving any longer. He stood still, together with the narrow dark chamber he was in. Next he heard monotonous snoring from somewhere.

"It looks like I'm sleeping after all," he went on pondering. "Otherwise there wouldn't be any snoring, would there?"

It never crossed his mind that it was the pike who was snoring and that he himself was imprisoned in the pike's belly. Unwillingly he began breathing at the same beat the pike was snoring, and so he didn't notice himself dozing off as well.

Suddenly the egg felt something sharp scratch his side, and instantly a dim light penetrated into his prison den. As we know, the sharp thing was nothing else but the claw of the crayfish who had begun to cut the pike's belly open. But the egg couldn't know it, and when he rolled out of the pike's belly he was firmly convinced that he was dreaming.

"Of course it's a dream," he thought, "because the darkness has vanished and I see a few things."

Certainly there were things to be seen. With wonderment he stared at a big snoring pike whose belly had been cut open. Then he saw two more figures, the crayfish and the frog. They seemed to be busy doing something. The crayfish was bending over the pike, the frog stood a bit farther away, looking very scared, and holding a big puff-ball under his arm. Then the crayfish took the puff-ball from the frog and stuffed it into the pike's belly. Immediately after that she began to sew up the belly with a needle and thread.

The crayfish certainly seemed to know the skill of sewing. The needle in her claws flashed quickly and the seams looked neat and straight.

"What are we going to do now?" asked the frog in a trembling voice. "How do we get the egg ashore?"

This was a big problem indeed, and the crayfish frowned thoughtfully. Then, luckily for them, the water rat walked out of his hole.

A beaming smile spread over the crayfish's face.

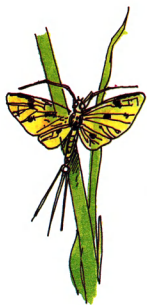
"A friend in need is a friend indeed," she said. "Nobody can do better than a rat when you need help in egg-transportation."

And from then on everything went just fine.

The water rat laid down on his back and the crayfish and the frog placed the egg on his chest. He clutched the egg tightly with all his four paws, and the other two dragged him to the river bank by his tail.







When they had left the pike at a safe distance the frog remarked smugly,

"It's going like a hayride!"

But the crayfish and the water rat had never been on a hayride in their life and therefore neither of them knew what to say next.

12. THE SMOKING RIVER

When the three of them emerged from the river, together with the egg, the hedgehog was overwhelmed with joy. She rolled herself up, trotted around in great delight, gave several ear-splitting whistles and shouted jubilantly,

"Oh my little egg! You are back at last!"

The mouse, too, was happy about the egg's escape.

"Welcome to the shore again, dear egg!" she squeaked.

The egg, however, retorted rather moodily,

"Can't you make less noise? I'm having an interesting dream and I don't fancy being awakened by your silly screams."

"Do you mean to say that you are sleeping?" wondered the mouse. "In that case, may I ask you what you are dreaming about?"

"I see myself having a hayride and the waggon is being drawn by a pair of horses," explained the egg.

The hedgehog burst out laughing.

"Oh you silly little one!" she chuckled mirthfully. "It's no dream. It's really happening to you. Only the waggon is actually uncle water rat and the horses are your friends the crayfish and the frog."

"Perhaps they are the water rat, the crayfish and the frog as you say," said the egg amiably enough. "But it's still a dream. If you don't believe me, just take a look at the river. Who ever has seen a river smoking but in a dream!"

As if by command, the others turned around in a body. Even the water rat who had been lying on his back got hastily to his feet, dropping the egg from his lap.

"My goodness," squeaked the mouse. "It's smoking indeed."

Although it seemed unbelievable, there could be no mistake about it. A brownish grey cloud of smoke was rising out of the river.

"It looks like we've made it," sighed the frog. "We would've died in the burning river."

"Well, it isn't as bad as that," said the crayfish. "I'd say...."
But the crayfish could not finish her sentence.

At that moment the pike thrust his head out of the river.
And now all of them could see clearly that the smoke came from no other place than from the open jaws of the pike.

"Help! Help!" shrieked the pike. "Something is burning in my belly."

The water rat shook his head in amazement.

"I never," he muttered. "The pike has found his tongue!"

And the frog added,

"It's most unusual. I thought he was dumb from birth."

The pike screamed again,

"Help! Help! There's no smoke without fire! Help me or I'll be done for!"

"You must take a drink of water," the mouse instructed.
"Water is good for putting out fires."

The pike did as he was told. He dived to the bottom and gulped his belly full of water. But when he thrust his head out of the river again his jaws were fuming even more than before.

"Oh my! Oh my! Oh my!" moaned the pike, struggling with violent fits of coughing.

The crayfish said to the pike,

"Dear fellow, you must go to the sea. There's too little water in the river. I'm sure the sea is a much better place for putting out fires."

The crayfish's words put the pike in a more cheerful mood.

"Thank you, crayfish," he said almost briskly. "To the sea I will go and put out this fire."

The next instant he was off like a flash, leaving a trail of smoke behind.

"Hurrah!" shouted the frog. "At last we've got rid of that villain!"

"I only hope this smoking disease of his is not catching," said the water rat worriedly.

Twitching her whiskers the crayfish chuckled,

"To tell the truth, it wasn't real smoke at all but our puff-ball. It burst in the pike's belly and let out puffs of dust."

The water rat breathed freely again. And since he had no other important tasks to tackle on dry land, he smoothed his whiskers, said farewell to the others and disappeared under the river bank.

The crayfish also thought that time had come to take her leave.

"I will never forget you, my dear friend," said the hedgehog.



"I will always remember that you brought the egg back to us."

"But prickles he still hasn't got," the crayfish said modestly.

"You're right," answered the hedgehog. "If he had prickles he would have more sense too."

The crayfish manoeuvred backwards to the river bank, waved her right claw in farewell and dipped into the river with a quiet plop.

13. THE EGG CONTINUES HIS JOURNEY

"I am awake now," declared the egg after the crayfish had disappeared.

"So you woke up," mocked the frog. "Are you quite sure about it?"

"Of course I am," said the egg. "Because I am exactly in the same place where I was before falling asleep. By the way, I dream! I was in the river-bed and even met the pike there."

The hedgehog couldn't believe her ears.

"Just fancy!" she said. "The egg believes that it was all a dream."

And the mouse piped angrily,

"He is beyond help."

"He hasn't learnt anything, even from being at death's door," added the frog.

"How obstinate and haughty can an egg be? What's the matter with him?" sighed the hedgehog.

"He's stupid, plain stupid! And that's all there's to it," said the frog.

A sudden loud screeching from the bushes startled the frog. It was the magpie who had flown back unnoticed.

"Chat-chat-chat, what a chit-chat!" scolded the magpie.

"The egg's not stupid, you are the one who is stupid. The egg will roll high up onto the hilltop and shine there for all to see."

"Right, magpie!" cried the egg excitedly. "Lead the way to the hill!"

"That's the talk. Let's get going, rolling and flying," cawed the magpie.

"Fly ahead, magpie!" called the egg. "I can roll as fast as you can fly."

The magpie didn't await to be asked twice. She made for the hill in a great hurry, and the egg rolled after her, without even saying good-bye to the others.



"Listen, little egg! Don't play the fool!" shouted the hedgehog.

But the egg wouldn't listen. He rolled on faster and faster. Presently he reached the tree log across the river. This time he did not gaze skywards any more and made the other bank very quickly.

"Well done!" the magpie called to him approvingly. "Now get up steam, you'll be going uphill!"

The egg rolled with all his might, and soon the hedgehog, the frog and the mouse could not sight him any more.

"He's gone!" squeaked the mouse.

"He's gone at last," croaked the frog.

But the hedgehog said,

"We must go after him."

This was too much for the other two. They couldn't take any more of this.

"You don't think we've had enough trouble with that puffed-up egg, do you?" grumbled the frog.

"He'll be the death of us, mark my words!" said the mouse.

But the hedgehog remained firm.

"How can we leave him at the mercy of the magpie," she said. "You saw it with your own eyes that he had no prickles on his back. It would be easy for the magpie to gobble up a prickleless egg."

"I should've sucked the egg empty after all," remarked the mouse. "Then the magpie wouldn't have been so keen to have him."

"Exactly," asserted the frog. "And we could've had some scrambled egg ourselves instead of the magpie."

"Stop that brattle!" the hedgehog snorted angrily.

The other two knew that once the hedgehog started snorting angrily, it would be no use arguing with her. After a short moment the three headed for the log, crossed to the other side of the river, and scurried towards the hill, in search of the naughty egg.



14. ON TOP OF THE HILL

Rolling uphill was no easy going, but as the egg did his utmost he reached the top after a while.

"Here we are!" cawed the magpie, alighting on her nest in the fir tree. "This is the high place where you wished to be. Now just look down and see what's below you."

And the egg did look. It was indeed a most exciting view. Everything could be seen so clearly. How small were the bushes in the meadow! And the river looked like a narrow ribbon, and the cowshed he had left was no bigger than a match-box.

"I never imagined it could be so wonderful to be on the hilltop," he shouted in delight.

He glanced down again and suddenly noticed three tiny creatures climbing up the hill.

"Look, magpie!" he shouted. "Can you see the three ants on their way to our hilltop?"

The magpie burst out laughing.

"Three ants! What a joke! They are the hedgehog, the mouse and the frog. Take a good look!"

The egg took a really good look and also recognized the hedgehog, the mouse and the frog. They had only looked like three tiny ants because of a great distance.

"They won't leave me alone, they're always trotting at my heels," he said, annoyed. "Especially the hedgehog who has the cheek to compare me with her little ones."

"What impudence!" cawed the magpie. "That's right, you're in a plight. I know a much higher place where you can hide without a trace."

"Really!" cried the egg excitedly. "Where is this place which is higher still? That's where I want to be—at the highest place!"

"That's my boy!" screamed the magpie. "Don't waste time come to the nest of mine!"

The egg looked at the magpie high up in the tree.

"I would love to! Tell me how!" cried the egg.

"How-how!" mocked the magpie. "That's no problem, I'll helicopter you."

Having said this, she spread out her wings and landed on the grass. Then she picked up the egg cautiously with her claws and flew with him into the air.

"We're flying!" shouted the egg delightedly. "Higher! Higher! Higher!"

That was just what the magpie did and soon she reached her nest, together with the egg.

"At long last I'm higher up than anybody else," said the egg, beaming all over. "This is just the right place for me!"

The magpie's nest was indeed the highest place of the whole neighbourhood. Everything looked even smaller from up here. The river was like a thin thread and the cowshed looked like a tiny dot.







"Chat-chat-chat," cried the magpie. "Now I'm in a hurry. Must make preparations for a dinner party. And invite all my relations."

"What about me? Am I also invited?" asked the egg.

The magpie laughed out loud,

"You are a funny one. We wouldn't be feasting, but for you. It's in your honour!"

Before she left she told the egg to be good and stay in the nest. After she was gone the egg got up and stood on the edge of the nest, being very proud of his great achievement in getting to such a high place in next to no time.

15. THE FALL

The egg was getting bored with the long wait. Suddenly he heard a familiar whistle. He listened very carefully. After a short while he heard the whistle again, it was now quite near. As can be expected, the whistle didn't belong to anybody else but the hedgehog, who, together with the frog and the mouse, was looking for the egg's tracks. The hedgehog was in the habit of calling her young with a whistle, and now she was doing the same thing for the egg.

The egg leant over the edge of the nest, curious to find out what it was all about. Of course, there they were—the hedgehog, the mouse and the frog. They were standing underneath the tree.

The mouse said in a small voice,

"I wonder where he's hiding."

"There's no sign of him on the hilltop," croaked the frog.

But the hedgehog said,

"We must look for him everywhere. Keep your eyes open!"

They looked under the bushes, snooped round the tree-stumps and stones, but couldn't find the slightest trace of the egg anywhere.

Giggling to himself, the egg watched them from the treetop. At first he had no intention of revealing his whereabouts but, on second thoughts, he wanted them to see in what a high place he now was. So he called out to them in a loud voice,

"I stand up here, higher than any of you!"

"Oh dear," squeaked the mouse. "He's got himself into the magpie's nest!"

"There you are—the higher he gets, the haughtier he becomes!" croaked the frog.





However, the hedgehog still had a small hope.
"Maybe it isn't the end yet. Maybe the magpie wants to keep him as her nest egg."

But the egg crushed all her illusions himself.

"We're going to throw a party up here. The magpie has already gone to invite her relations," he announced pompously.

The frog and the mouse fell silent and only shook their heads. The hedgehog, however, was in great anguish.

"Oh my poor little egg! Can't you see, she'll feast on you!"

"Don't talk silly! The magpie is my best friend," retorted the egg.

"Just imagine!" squeaked the mouse. "He thinks the magpie is his friend!"

"But of course she is. After all, it was she who helped me to get to this high place. And now I'm looking down on all of you!"

"He hasn't changed a bit," croaked the frog.

Even the hedgehog said,

"I'm sorry to say but I also feel that nothing can change him for the better."

The egg seemed to become even more full of himself.

"Listen to that! They want to make me better!" he shrieked.

"Nothing can improve me! I am perfect! Just look how beautifully I am!"

Saying this, he rolled to the very edge of the nest and spun round and round as proudly as a peacock.

"Be careful!" shouted the frog. "You'll fall out!"

The egg was too much carried away with his show to take any notice of the frog's warning.

"Look how beautifully oval I am," he boasted.

"Easy!" squeaked the mouse. "You'll fall out and break your shell!"

Making another whirl, he answered,

"Look how beautifully smooth I am!"

The hedgehog snorted angrily,

"Get back into the nest at once!" she warned.

Thereupon the egg said contemptuously,

"Don't you try to teach me! I stand highest of you all. I am beautiful and smooth. I am cleverer than the three of you put together!"

Then something dreadful happened—the egg seemed to be losing his balance.

"He's going to fall!" cried the hedgehog.

And he did. Down, down, down he fell, his face white with horror.

The hedgehog, the frog and the mouse were frozen to the spot. There was nothing they could do for the egg now.

And with a loud crack the egg struck the ground. In the deep silence it sounded almost like a rifle shot.

16. THE CHICK AND THE HEN

The hedgehog, the frog and the mouse still stood motionless. They had even closed their eyes tightly. They didn't want to look. It was terrifying to think of the height from which he had fallen. The awful sound of crashing was still hammering in their ears.

Suddenly all three of them were almost startled out of their wits. Just over there, where the egg had fallen, they heard a sweet young voice peeping.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't frighten you, did I?"

The hedgehog, the mouse and the frog opened their eyes and looked toward the direction of the voice. And what they saw was beyond belief—a tiny yellow chick stood among the broken pieces of the egg's shell.

"Excuse my tousled feathers," said the chick. "I just came out of the shell and haven't brushed myself as yet."

"Oh you little silly one!" exclaimed the hedgehog. "Your feathers are beautifully yellow, they are not tousled at all."

The chick bowed politely and said,

"I also think I'm silly. You see, I haven't learnt anything yet."

"He is modest and shy," croaked the frog. "Who could have ever thought that out of our haughty egg would step such a lovely chick. It's a miracle."

And the mouse squeaked,

"I feel like crying when I think that we wanted to suck the egg empty! What would have become of the chick then!"

The hedgehog walked up to the chick and looked at him lovingly.

"To tell the truth, you don't look a bit like my own little ones but I like you a hundred times more than I did the haughty egg."

Suddenly the chick grew worried.

"You are all very kind to me," he said. "Still, I can't help feeling that this hilltop is not the right place for me. I feel I should go home. My mother is probably waiting for me already."



"I'm sure she is," asserted the hedgehog. "And my little ones are waiting for me. They are so funny and oval too, just like eggs, but of course they have prickles on their backs."

Suddenly they all heard a cackling sound close by.

"This voice...." said the chick anxiously. "I think I know it although I've never heard it before."

Before the others could answer the hen came running out of the bushes.

"Excuse me, everybody," she cackled. "I'm so worried and unhappy. Great misfortune has befallen me! I laid a very haughty egg. He thought he was much cleverer than me and ran away to the wood."

"Please don't upset yourself," the hedgehog tried to interrupt her.

But the hen went on,

"How can I help it! I laid a haughty egg and therefore I am responsible for him."

She would have probably cackled on for quite some time if the hedgehog hadn't managed to explain,

"Your haughty egg has become a sweet lovely chick."

At the same moment the chick ran up to the hen.

"Dear mother! I'm so happy to see you," he peeped.

The mother stroked the chick lovingly with her beak.

"My sweetie," she cooed. "The egg was so arrogant and haughty but you...."

"He is very modest," croaked the frog.

"And very polite," squeaked the mouse.

And the hedgehog said,

"He's the most beautiful and sensible chick I've ever seen."

"How happy I am!" cackled the mother hen. "What a dear little chick I have! He's mother's own little baby!"

Soon after this the hen and the chick went homeward, accompanied by the hedgehog, the frog and the mouse. It was long after their departure that the magpie returned with her relations and found the nest empty.

"Chat-chat-chat!" the magpies screeched in disappointment. "How can you make merry with an empty belly!"

